DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 161 854 95 SP 013 250

TITLE How Good Is Your Teacher? Options in Education Transcript: Program No. 134.
INSTITUTION George Washington Univ., Washington, D.C. Inst. for Educational Leadership.; National Public Radio, Washington, D.C.
SPONS AGENCY Carnegie Corp. of New York, N.Y.; Corporation for Public Broadcasting, New York, N.Y.; National Inst. of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
PUB DATE 78
NOTE 22p.
AVAILABLE FROM National Public Radio--Education, 2025 M Street, N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036 ($0.50)

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Educational Accountability; *Educational Radio; *Effective Teaching; Student Evaluation of Teacher Performance; Teacher Administrator Relationship; *Teacher Evaluation; *Teaching Quality; *Tenure
IDENTIFIERS *Radio Programs; Transcripts

ABSTRACT

This transcript of a National Public Radio program discusses the subject of teacher effectiveness under the following topics: (1) rating teachers by student test scores; (2) observation method of teacher evaluation; (3) self-evaluation of teachers; (4) subtle ways of weeding out ineffective teachers; (5) impact of accountability on the teaching profession; (6) administrator's view of teacher evaluation; (7) annual evaluation of teacher performance; (8) opposition to the concept of teacher tenure; (9) university tenure systems; and (10) adverse impacts of tenure in higher education. The program approaches this subject through a dialogue format involving program narrator, administrators, teachers, and students. (DS)

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Options in Education
TRANSCRIPT:

Program No. 134: "HOW GOOD IS YOUR TEACHER?"

SP013 250

A co-production of
National Public Radio & the
Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University

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"HOW GOOD IS YOUR TEACHER?"

MERROW: What do you think about your teacher?

STUDENT: Sometimes she gets candy treats for us. I like the candy.

STUDENT: And cupcakes sometimes. And she used to give me roasted almonds and all that stuff, like a real teacher does.

MERROW: What has she taught you, specifically? What kinds of things has she taught you that you keep in mind?

STUDENT: A lot of math, and a lot of other stuff, like counting to, like, a thousand, to, like, fifty, something like that, and about, like, 145 to 95, and stuff like that.

STUDENT: She lets me draw my maps. I love geography. Last year I was never absent. I hope I wouldn't be never absent this year.

* * *

MERROW: How do you know if teachers are good?

REINHARDT: The old answer to that question was based on a combination of common sense, folk wisdom and gut reaction, something like "Well, you can just tell. Everybody knows. I know a good teacher when I see one.

MERROW: But that's not good enough any more, not in an age of measurements, standardized tests and accountability.

REINHARDT: There's a lot of pressure to prove who's a good teacher and who's not, and to get rid of or re-train those that don't measure up.

I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow. And this week on OPTIONS IN EDUCATION, we're going to try to answer the question, "How can you tell a good teacher from a bad one?"

REINHARDT: Of course, we're actually going to give you about a dozen different ways to tell, so you may end up just as confused as a lot of educators seem to be.

MERROW: A better way to phrase the question is, "What criteria should be used to make judgments about teachers?" Student academic performance? The teacher's own college degrees? Observations by administrators? How well the teachers fit in? Complaints from parents, or what?

RE-LICENSING OF TEACHERS

REINHARDT: The normal method is observation by administrators, and that's what most teachers are used to.

SUTTLE: I was observed yesterday in class. My department head came in, listened to the lesson. And we discussed the lesson and the advantages and disadvantages of taking this or that methodology. That is the point at which the correction has to be made, not by making up some -- there is no magic test.

REINHARDT: That's Al Suttle, a teacher and union leader in the Stamford, Connecticut public schools. We asked him if he'd object to taking a test every three or four years, a kind of re-licensing exam.

SUTTLE: What a terrible indictment of the college and university

systems....

MERROW: Okay. Now don't get off on that now. Just tell me yes or no to the question of testing teachers, in effect testing them to see if they're licensed to teach, or ought to be renewed?

SUTTLE: I would have to say that when we put adults and prospective teachers through their paces and put them in their traces for the teaching profession, well, we demand a great deal of them in terms of the liberal arts, and in terms of methodology courses, and so forth. And I would hope that a board of education would look carefully at the record of such individuals as they come into the system. If you have set up a system for the assessment and evaluation of your staff, why is it then necessary? Are you then saying that the people you have hired in a management position to assess the teaching ability of the teachers -- are you saying they aren't doing their job?

MERROW: Well, here's what they're saying. Here's what another board member is saying. "Look, in the 1960s, we were short of teachers and we hired a lot of people who aren't up to snuff. And we need some way to get them out and get in some of the good young people who are now coming out of the teacher training institutions."

SUTTLE: Such generalizations disturb me.

MERROW: Well, hey, there was a shortage of teachers. There were a lot of kids, and there weren't enough teachers. They hired people who perhaps don't meet the standards that they could set today. It's a buyer's market today.

SUTTLE: I couldn't deny what you say. It's probably true that there is a surplus of teachers today and you have a better choice. But at the same time, to categorize all those who were hired in the '60s, or a vast proportion of those as being less than adequately prepared I think is a terrible indictment and an insult to the many teachers who were qualified at the time. I think if you're willing to say, sure, there were some teachers there we're concerned about; we don't believe they're doing the job they should be doing, then I think it's incumbent upon you as a board member to see that those teachers are adequately supervised and evaluated so that....

MERROW: First you've got to identify them.

SUTTLE: That is the purpose of the evaluation system.

REINHARDT: Al Suttle, the union leader and high school teacher in the Stamford, Connecticut public schools. That school system is keenly interested in more quality control in its schools, and we'll hear from a couple of school board members later in the program.

RATING TEACHERS BY STUDENT TEST SCORES

MERROW: Well, if teachers don't want to be tested themselves, how about testing their students and evaluating the teachers on that basis? I asked one teacher how she and her colleagues might feel about that approach.

TEACHER: Now, I think you will find very few teachers who would disagree with this as being one of the things. But I think there should be other things of measuring the teacher's ability, the child's ability. Again, you're putting -- I do not believe in exploiting children.

MERROW: Now in my role as John Q. Public here, I'm also then saying, "Well, if we do this, then you don't need tenure, because every year we'll have a system. It will measure your performance. If your performance is up to snuff, another contract for you. If it's not, good-bye."

TEACHER: I'm afraid again that you are going to find that tests are made

by individuals. Individuals cannot separate their own personal interests....

MERROW: Now wait a minute. You just agreed that a test should be one-third of your system, or some portion of the way we evaluate you. Now you're backing away from it.

TEACHER: If you are going to make as strong a statement to me as you just did, then I will have to back away from this, yes. Because unless you let us prepare our own test -- we know what the child needs to know when they come to us in September. And therefore, we go back and we teach the child. We do not want to teach a test. We want to teach the child. If he has deficiencies, we want to fill these gaps and these deficiencies, and we do not want to be teaching a test and not a child.

MERROW: But I have the sense -- I have the sense that the public is not going to buy that argument. You know, a public that's voted overwhelmingly for a Proposition 13 in California, and there is this mood of conservatism, a mood of, you know, fiscal tightening, is going to say, "Hey, we want some clear evidence that the teachers we're paying so much money to are really up to snuff." Now maybe they're not paying you that much money. But there is this mood. And so it seems like some system is going to be developed.

TEACHER: Then I think we're in a lot of trouble. This is inconsistent. They're saying we want you to do your job. We have a child that cannot read, and rather than teaching him to read, we want you to teach him to put X's on a piece of paper. No, I think that I probably was not paying enough attention when you said a third of the evaluation, because we're not being fair to the child. We're putting too much pressure on the child, and this is exploiting the child. We're telling him "We don't want you to learn. We don't want you to think for yourself. We want you to be able to pass this test in the spring so that I can be re-hired." That's ridiculous. That's exploiting the child.

MERROW: You know, a lot of teachers always come back to that same old general line, which is whatever you do, there's no way to measure how good a teacher I am. So give us tenure, and we'll measure ourselves. Trust us. We care about children, etcetera. You know, just as patriots wrap themselves in the flag, you all seem to wrap yourselves in a flag of children, as it were.

TEACHER: The only way that I know to answer you is that I taught high school reading for seven years. And these youngsters are definitely youngsters with problems, or they still would not be taking reading classes at the high school level. Very often at the end of a school year, I was not sure whether or not I had succeeded with a student. And only after the student graduated and we were able to observe his performance, his drive, his enthusiasm, his success with our American way of life, if we're coming back to the flag, well, then, in certain instances, I could tell whether or not I had succeeded.

I'm sorry. This is the day of instant relief, instant this, instant soup, instant coffee. And if the public wants instant results from the teachers and instant results from the children, we may have to capsule both like we do the coffee. Because I'm not really sure that you can get instant results from children. I think that you have to wait; you have to see what their successes are. A student that you were certain was not going to amount to anything that comes back five years after graduation and embraces you and says "You have done more for me than any other teacher I ever had; I thought you were mean and I thought you were tough; I thought you were unfair, and thank you for everything you did": to me this means more than what John Q. Public thinks. And if it costs me my job, then perhaps tenure's not worth the paper it's written on any way.

REINHARDT: That teacher's answer that there's no easy way to tell how good a teacher is will be a bitter pill for those who want a quick solution.

MERROW: She's right about time and changing perspectives. I'll bet all

of you had a teacher you said was awful. But then after a few years went by, maybe even ten or fifteen years, then you realized that that awful teacher actually taught you to write, or to understand math, or to think clearly.

OBSERVATION METHOD OF TEACHER EVALUATION

REINHARDT: If there's no easy way, that brings us back to observation by administrators. But that method has its problems, as one teacher from Texas told John.

TEACHER: Your principal should be your evaluator. But, now, how does he evaluate you? Each school district has different forms to do it with. And in some of them, it's done on personality alone. Others, the principal may actually go into that room, observe. If you have a thousand different districts, you have a thousand different systems.

MERROW: How is it in your school district?

TEACHER: The principal evaluates the teachers. And the same thing goes in that district. In one school, the principal may go into that school and he may observe in the classroom. He may observe every teacher. In our district, it's done on a quarterly basis. So in each school year he comes in four times, or you're evaluated four times. And if you have three bad evaluations and then bring up the fourth one, well, then you've got a good recommendation. It's only the last one that goes in, that goes to the superintendent's office.

MERROW: It sounds as if there's an awful lot of power in the hands of that principal.

TEACHER: You're absolutely correct. You're correct.

MERROW: You remember anything, any stories where things have gone wrong, where it really has been personality?

TEACHER: Conflict of personality between principal and teacher? Yes. And that teacher does have recourse, in that if she gets a bad evaluation, she can put a letter in her personnel folder that gives the reasons why she doesn't think that she should be evaluated that way. Now, that does not necessarily mean that that teacher's going to be fired. It may mean that that teacher is moved to another school. And, see, this happens. And you have teachers that ought not to be in teaching positions. And so this works to the principal's disadvantage. He may give that teacher a bad evaluation, which she deserved. The personnel director will just move her to another building. And maybe that principal will give her a bad evaluation. She'll be moved to another building.

So the system is not good.

MERROW: I talked to that teacher at the annual meeting of the National Education Association in Dallas, Texas. What she said about administrators who won't do their job is a familiar theme among teachers. I've heard dozens of stories about principals who were afraid to criticize a bad teacher in writing. So instead, they write a glowing letter of recommendation and transfer the teacher to another school.

REINHARDT: Or maybe to a non-teaching position in the same school.

MERROW: That Texas teacher has a solution: let the teachers be the judge; let them police their own profession, with a code of conduct and committees to do the judging, the way doctors do, or lawyers.

REINHARDT: Anytime you talk about measuring teacher performance and accountability, sooner or later the conversation comes around to tenure.

MERROW: Which to a lot of people means a lifetime job. Well, that's not what tenure means, or not what it's supposed to mean, any way.

REINHARDT: Tenure does mean job protection. It means a teacher cannot be fired without some proof that he or she is not doing the job.

MERROW: But teachers can be fired.

REINHARDT: Sure, but not without due process. In fact, a lot of teachers will say that that's what tenure means -- due process. The word "tenure" isn't important.

MERROW: Most of the 2.2 million teachers in this country are protected by some sort of tenure law, though the laws differ from state to state. According to the most recent survey we could find -- it's nearly six years old -- thirty-eight states and the District of Columbia have statewide tenure laws.

REINHARDT: And another seven states have tenure laws that apply to some, but not all parts of the states.

MERROW: Very few states, only about five, have no laws providing either long-term contracts, tenure or due process protection.

REINHARDT: Basically in every state, it's up to the administrator to observe the teacher, suggest changes and make judgments.

SELF-EVALUATION OF TEACHERS

MERROW: School critic John Holt think school administrators should have no say in evaluating teachers.

HOLT: The only people who can make -- the only person who can make a teacher accountable -- well, two people. One is the teacher. I mean I held myself accountable long before there ever was such a word. When I started teaching, I said to myself it's my job to figure out ways to have these kids learn this stuff, and if they're not learning it, it's up to me to figure out. It's not their fault, you know. I don't make some kind of alibi; I've got to figure out a way to do it. That's my job. And I have to keep at it until I do find a way. And sometimes it took ten, fifteen years. I don't know how to get rid of all those people who've been taught that nonsense.

The only other person who can make a teacher accountable are the learners. I mean if teachers had to hang up shingles out over the street like lawyers or doctors, we would find out pretty quick who was a good teacher and who wasn't, because the bad ones would have no customers. The reason they don't learn anything is partly because the customers are locked in; there's no feedback. Nobody can make that judgment. If you don't let the kds make the judgment, nobody else can make it any better. I'm not saying the learner's judgment would be infallible, but it would be a hundred times better than anything else. Everything else invites cheating.

MERROW: Author and school critic, John Holt, talking to David Freudberg of Station WGBH, Boston.

* * *

CHILD: My teacher's nice. She lets us do lots of things outside. Then we get to play games.

MERROW: Why do you like her?

CHILD: She doesn't put anyone in our class in the corner.

CHILD: Other teachers do that.

MERROW: Why is that good?

CHILD: 'Cause they don't do bad things.

MERROW: What do you think about your teacher?

YOUNGSTER: I hate him.

MERROW: Why?

YOUNGSTER: He's terrible.

MERROW: What does he do?

YOUNGSTER: Tell him.

YOUNGSTER: He'll make you put out your hand and he'll slap it real hard. He's just so mean.

YOUNGSTER: I think he's very nice. He's funny, and I think he teaches us pretty good, pretty well.

* * *

SUBTLE WAYS OF WEEDING OUT INEFFECTIVE TEACHERS

REINHARDT: Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers, thinks you don't necessarily need kids' opinions, parents' opinions or formal administrative procedures to get rid of bad teachers. Sometimes they just leave quietly on their own.

SHANKER: There are teachers who start teaching, who come in in September and they last three days, or one day, or six days. They can't take it any more, and out they go, and nobody pulls them back. So you get a large number of teachers who leave that way.

Then you get quite a few with the superintendent or the principal going up to them and saying "John or Mary, I think you're doing a terrible job. You may disagree with me. But if you leave quietly, I'll give you a good letter of recommendation for some other job. But if you don't, I'm going to go after you." And thousands of people leave. They not only leave their school districts, but after going through that once or twice, they find that this isn't the field for them, and they go elsewhere.

MERROW: You're advocating that as a system of getting rid of teachers who don't do their jobs?

SHANKER: It's the same system we use in public broadcasting and in synagogues and in churches and in book clubs and department stores. It's the American way. You don't bring everyone up on trial. In many cases, the boss just sits down and says "I think you'd be happier elsewhere. When are you going to leave, this month or three months from now?" And you work it out privately.

REINHARDT: Albert Shanker, president of the AFT, the American Federation of Teachers. He says the informal system works pretty well. But it's not working well enough for many administrators and for many politicians. They want some standard system, some mechanical measurement approach.

MERROW: According to Terry Herndon, Executive Director of the National Education Association, the other teacher union, that isn't fair. Herndon says that school systems tell teachers they want one thing, academic achievement of kids, for example, but then judge the teachers on the basis of other things.

HERNDON: We specify that we want students in this grade level to accom-

plish what we call one year's growth in arithmetic. But then we tell the teacher that you must use this book, you must group the students this way; you cannot do "X," "Y" and "Z." You have no opportunity to diversify the materials. You have a straitjacketed program. And then [they] come back at the end of the year and evaluate the teacher on the basis of stability in the classroom: how much disruption was there? What was the state of discipline in the classroom? Did they live by all the rules? Did the children spill out into the school? Did they move around the school or create problems for others? In almost every case the quoted expectation becomes almost irrelevant in the total evaluation of the teacher, because we do want the teachers, and expect the teachers, to do a lot of things. And we expect them to do them simultaneously.

If you state all of those clearly at the outset and the teacher accepts the bargain; that is, "I will do those things, and I can do them under these conditions," and the conditions are provided: I think you have the framework for an evaluation.

MERROW: You've said that the people who evaluate the teachers do it on variables that weren't made clear at the beginning. Okay, well, that's bad. But then, in fact, there may be the situation at the other end, which is tenure. The teacher gets tenure and essentially, really, is not evaluated thereafter. I mean that's a lifetime job, or at least that's certainly the public perception.

HERNDON: The state of evaluation of teachers is abominable. I would agree with that. There's practically no supervision provided to most of the teachers in the country. And that is a deficiency in the way tenure laws work. But I can tell you and contend vigorously that tenure laws, as written, are healthy and can work, and that if they don't work, if we don't uncover deficiencies in performance, it's not the fault of the performer. It's the one who had the responsibility to evaluate the performance. Anybody that evaluates professionals has the problem with subjectivity, because you are, in the last analysis, evaluating the quality of their judgment. They did one thing, and it is the judgment of the evaluator that they should have done something else. But most teachers are not observed at work more than five or ten minutes a year. That's outrageous. I agree.

MERROW: How would you improve the system? Just have more observation?

HERNDON: I think the school board has to articulate good policies. But the final burden is on the principal, or whoever is the supervisor in the school. He needs to quote his expectations of the teaching faculty in very specific terms. And then he needs to have a monitoring process, an observing process that allows one to accumulate data as to whether those teachers performed as they were expected to perform. But results are the result of the performance. You hold the teacher responsible for what the teacher does. Did the teacher do what a reasonable teacher should have done? I don't believe they can be held responsible for the results.

MERROW: Wait a minute; I don't think I understand that. You're saying tell the teachers ahead of time that you expect them to do "A," "B," "C" and "D." And if they do "A," "B," "C" and "D," they are, therefore, good teachers; they are performing properly. It doesn't matter how the kids turn out. Is that what you're saying?

HERNDON: I'm saying you can evaluate performance. That's right. And that's about the only thing you can evaluate. This is the way we expect teachers to behave. This is what we expect them to do. This is how we expect them to handle circumstances. And all of that matrix presupposes that's the way you get results. Now it may be the teacher's judgment that if I do it a different way, I'll get better results. If you want to evaluate results, you have to give the teacher the freedom to decide how to pursue the results. Our structure doesn't do that. Teachers get fired on the basis of

whether they perform the way they were expected to perform. If the system wants to impose the performance expectations, then it is the system that was imposed that's responsible for the results or the lack thereof.

In my ideal school, I would focus on results. I would grant the teachers broad discretion in terms of how to pursue those results. I would let them choose the materials. I would give them flexible budgets. I would give them broad discretion in terms of disciplinary techniques. I would make materials and equipment and supplies available to them and hold them responsible for results. But that's not the real world of today's school.

MERROW: But in your ideal school, you'd can 'em if they didn't produce?

HERNDON: Yes, I would.

REINHARDT: Terry Herndon, Executive Director of the NEA, the National Education Association.

MERROW: Herndon says he would use results -- that is, kids' learning -- as a way to judge. But you can be sure he wouldn't use standardized tests to measure the results. The NEA opposes standardized tests and wants a moratorium on their use.

IMPACT OF ACCOUNTABILITY ON TEACHING PROFESSION

REINHARDT: The president of that union, John Ryor, says that the current push for accountability and measurement may be aimed at bad teachers, but it's going to hurt older ones.

RYOR: I recall that when tenure came in in Michigan, we had teachers who had been teaching for fifteen, sixteen, seventeen years who'd come from some of the country and some of the rural schools, and some of the administrators and boards wanted to get rid of them. Now, there's a horrendous concept there that's important to me, and it's important to anybody who ought to advocate for the needs of teachers, employees generally. That is, for sixteen years those people were acceptable. But all of a sudden, when a tenure law came into being and it became necessary to make a qualitative judgment about the value of the teacher, there was a rush to all of a sudden dismiss people or decide all of a sudden that we ought to put them under a couple of years' probation because we don't know they're good.

There's a concept not only in labor relations, but I think in just public philosophy about workers in this country; that, of course, they're not as good or productive or as fast at age sixty as they were at age twenty-five. Nobody ever is. Your physical capacity changes. Your ability changes. You may slow down some. But I think the concept is that we tend to reward those who faithfully served over a long period of time by tolerating those physiological shortcomings and allowing, perhaps, the break-off in productivity.

Now if we want to say that teaches past forty-five, that the profession is just too pressured, that the profession is too demanding to make it possible physiologically, mentally for a teacher to move on past that age, then we're going to have to do something about two things: the pay scale and the retirement system to encourage teachers to move in a different direction. And we're not there. We're not even within a hundred thousand country miles of that concept.

MERROW: But there is a general public image, I think, that, well, you know, teachers have it pretty easy; they get summers off. And then the other thing is, well, teachers get tenure. They have this permanent job, this cushy job that they never can get fired from.

RYOR: Well, less than half the teachers in this country have tenure.

So I don't know what people think. And in regard to the "cushy job," those who claim it's a cushy job haven't been inside a school in so long that I think it's time they went back and examined what's there.

REINHARDT: John Ryor, President of the National Education Association, the teacher union.

MERROW: We're giving the teachers a lot of time to make their case, and, in a minute, we'll hear another voice, that of the administrators.

REINHARDT: But not before we hear one more indictment of administrators by union leader Albert Shanker.

SHANKER: Tenure means you've been employed by a board of education and they've looked at you for at least a three year period of time, and they've said, all right, we think you're good enough; we want to keep you; we've giving you a commitment that from now on, unless we can show that you've done something that's terrible or that you're incompetent or insubordinate, or something else, you've got a commitment for a job. Now I still, by the way, do not know of an administrator who properly does the job of supervision who will not win out of, let's say, ten years later the teacher's performance deteriorates for some reason and the principal observes the teacher several times and makes constructive suggestions and tries to help, and, as a result of that process, the teacher still does not improve. I don't know of any judge in this country who would overrule the decision of the principal or the superintendent and say "You're wrong." But that isn't what usually happens. What happens is that you've got a teacher who's been working in a district for fifteen years. All of the evaluations are positive, saying you're fine; you're good; you're satisfactory. And one day the principal has an argument with a teacher. She got angry. She didn't want to cover a class, or didn't want to go out and do yard patrol, or didn't get some records in on time, or something like that. And the principal's frustrated with a lot of other things that happened that day, and that day he decides, well, she's got to go.

Well, of course, then we've got a great time in court. We could show that that very same principal has given positive evaluations and made an on-the-spot angry judgment on the basis of some encounter, and we win those cases. We don't win the cases where the principal does a systematic evaluation job over a period of time. There, the judge, jury will always accept the word of the supervisor.

MERROW: Or the other possibility is that the administrator over all those years hasn't bitten the bullet and hasn't written the harsh recommandation....

SHANKER: Well, get rid of the administrator. If you've got an incompetent administrator who's going to give a person for fifteen years, ten, fifteen, twenty years, ever year sends that person a note saying "Your job is satisfactory," and then one year decides that either he's changed his mind or, all of a sudden, has found some courage, well, that tells you more about the administrator than about that teacher.

MERROW: So you're saying the problem is not with the tenure system, but with the way the observation process goes on.

SHANKER: Look, we do have people in education who shouldn't be teaching. We're not disagreeing. We don't think it's a major problem. There are some. Most people are doing a good job. There are some at one end of the fringe who are incompetent, and we should find ways of reaching them; we should find ways of trying to help them, and if they can't be helped, out they should go. But there is also a problem with management. Many principals and superintendents like to be popular. They feel that if they give someone an adverse rating that they're not going to be loved. Well, you don't have to

e loved, at least not loved for that reason.

REINHARDT: Albert Shanker of the AFT, putting the ball squarely back in the administrator's court.

ADMINISTRATOR'S VIEW OF TEACHER EVALUATION

SALMON: I think that a good evaluation system in a school system should be designed to make good teachers feel good and bad teachers feel sufficiently uncomfortable to change their ways.

MERROW: Paul Salmon represents administrators. That's his job here in Washington as Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators.

SALMON: The most important job that the administrator has to accomplish is to improve instruction. And the most important single way to do that is through the judicious selection and separation of teaching personnel. So if you're an administrator committed to that professional opinion, you don't feel uncomfortable about telling teachers there are discrepancies in their performance, because your focus is on the child, not the teacher. If the child is being shortchanged by bad instruction, then you should feel outraged.

REINHARDT: Well, that's wonderful. You're really saying it the way it should be, and I'm sure the way, in fact, it is in many cases. But still, there are lots of principals who really can't deal with those issues. What can be done about that?

SALMON: Get rid of them. That's the name of the game. If you have incompetent administrators, you'll certainly have incompetent teachers. The most important person in any segment of a school district is the school administrator, because the administrator sets the tone. The administrator sets the standards. If the administrator is a visionary who can expand the vision of teachers, who can be a person that augments their needs and supplies them with things that they need to achieve new and higher goals, then even average teachers can become better than average. If the administrator waffles on whether the standards of performance are acceptable, nobody ever knows. And consquently there's great uncertainty, and the school is doomed to greater failure than would otherwise be the case.

Somebody has to evaluate the principal in terms of his or her evaluation of the teachers. I had a teacher who was -- I'll use this as the most dramatic example -- who suffered from narcolepsy. Now, narcolepsy is the inability to say awake. This teacher twice went to sleep while the principal was supervising her.

REINHARDT: You mean he was in the same room?

SALMON: He was in the room supervising -- or she; it was a woman principal -- supervising a woman teacher, and the teacher went to sleep twice. We urged the teacher to get medical treatment and psychiatric treatment. She refused. The condition did not improve. We brought our case. The hearing officer sustained it. But when it came to the board for dismissal, there were ten parents who fought for that teacher because of the good job that teacher was doing with their children. Now what I'm saying is that even the most incompetent will sometimes have a political base someplace that will be bought to bear at the time the question of separation is raised. If General Motors has an incompetent manager, they'd fire that manager, and nobody complains. The manager's family can't complain through any political process. And that's the end of it. If you fire a principal in a school system, you have all kinds of mechanisms from the community, from principals' organizations, from many directions that are brought to bear on the politically elected boards. And sometimes it's impossible to get rid of incompetent people because of the

politics of the situation.

MERROW: Paul Salmon of the American Association of School Administrators in Washington, D. C.

ANNUAL EVALUATION OF TEACHER PERFORMANCE

REINHARDT: Ultimately the responsibility for teaching quality and administrator quality lies with the school boards.

MERROW: In Stamford, Connecticut, the board is actively concerned about the educational background of its school teachers, and so it's trying to develop a system to test all those teachers.

REINHARDT: It all started nearly three years ago when the child of one school board member brought a note home from his teacher. The note contained several errors in grammar and spelling. At the next school board meeting, the board member pushed through a resolution requiring all teachers to take a standardized English grammar test.

MERROW: Well, the testing never took place, because the board got worried about lawsuits. Stamford schools now require all applicants for teaching jobs to write a four hundred word essay about a critical issue in education. But that doesn't affect anyone already teaching in Stamford.

REINHARDT: Some school board members have another solution: do away with tenure and replace it with yearly evaluations.

STONE: As we get better and more objective and fairer, more valid evaluation of a teacher's performance, that it might then become a much easier thing to be able to weed out those teachers who have let themselves slip over the years, the ones who don't keep up on their professional competency, the ones who don't perform up to the level we expect.

REINHARDT: Elhanan Stone. He's the board member whose child's teacher made all those grammatical errors.

STONE: I think the ordinary private employee that we see in our society, non-union, has a day-to-day contract.

MERROW: So it'd be kind of like -- it'd be kind of like being manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers. You get a one year contract that's renewed at the end of the season.

STONE: That's right. That's what it would be. Yes.

MERROW: And what's the basis now? I mean you have a performance based teacher evaluation. Are you going to use my kids' performance, I mean if I'm your teacher, to determine whether I stay?

STONE: No, because kids' test scores are not necessarily a function of how good a teacher you have. You may have a super-bright kid and the worst teacher in the world, and the kid's going to learn. Or you might have a dumb kid and a terrific teacher, and the kid is not going to learn. There is some correlation, clearly, between good teaching and learning. But I think it's so difficult to quantify that to use it as a criterion as to whether or not a teacher is going to be kept is fallacious. Performance based teacher evaluation has to do with various criteria which will be agreed upon between teachers and supervisors. And an evaluation will be made periodically as to whether or not the teacher is living up to those criteria. And we will have an ongoing discussion between teachers and their supervisors as to whether the criteria are realistic, whether they ought to be expanded, contracted; whether or not the teacher can live up to them; what kind of effort the teacher ought to be making. And I think that that continuous kind of evaluation, which is expected

to go on under performance based teacher evaluation will be an effective way of evaluating whether or not the teacher is doing the job. As it is now, it's very hard to tell. If we see that a teacher gets, oh, fives on an evaluation form, does that come from the teacher being a super-teacher, or does it come from an administrator with lack of courage? No way we can tell.

MERROW: You said earlier that in private business, people, in effect, have a day-to-day contract. Do you really mean that?

STONE: I sure do. I could be fired tomorrow.

MERROW: On what basis?

STONE: On the basis of someone not liking what I did, not liking the job that I did, not liking me as a person, finding....

MERROW: Are you arguing that that's a system that public schools ought to emulate? You don't mean that.

STONE: No, I did not say that. That's why I suggested very clearly that teachers not be on a day-to-day basis. Government employees are in a different situation. No question about it. However, so as not to cast great fear into everyone's heart, we do have people on that kind of year-to-year basis. All our administrators are on year-to-year contracts. In fact, they aren't even on really year-to-year contracts. But there is a consideration made every year as to whether they are to continue. And generally unless an administrator really messes up, he does continue in the job. But an administrator does not have tenure as an administrator in Connecticut. He only has tenure as a teacher. And the perception by that administrator's superior that he is not doing his job properly will be grounds for removal of that administrator.

REINHARDT: Elhanan Stone, a school board member in Stamford, Connecticut.

MERROW: Connecticut has spent several years developing what it calls a performance based evaluation of teachers, or PBET system. Some teachers fear that once it's tested and supposedly working that there'll be attempts to repeal the state's teacher tenure law.

OPPOSITION TO THE CONCEPT OF TEACHER TENURE

REINHARDT: Stamford board member Stone isn't happy with tenure. But he's not the most vocal critic.

SILVIERA: I can say that I have never asked a teacher whom I think is really excellent whether they'd be willing to give up tenure and have the answer come back "no."

REINHARDT: The most vocal critic, the hawk on tenure, is Stamford board member Sally Silviera.

SILVIERA: Any good teacher would be not only willing to give up tenure, but be willing to submit themselves to a competency test.

MERROW: What that reminds me of is back in the Nixon days when there was talk of wiretapping. You know, if I objected to the fact that my phone was bugged, the people would say, "Well, what do you object to, unless you're doing something wrong?" I mean that's a kind of witchhunt almost.

SILVIERA: Oh, no, no. It's not meant as a witchhunt. But if you've been in the company of teachers and heard them say things like "Well, I should have went to Kaldor's," you have to make some judgments that perhaps we do have people who are not competent.

MERROW: But what you're saying is if they're good, they wouldn't mind

being tested.

SILVIERA: That's right. Yes. I really don't see -- I don't see the parallel, frankly.

MERROW: The parallel is because, by inference, because by implication, anyone who says "No, I won't give up tenure" is, by your standards, somehow questionable as to their competence.

SILVIERA: No. Let's get back to the competency test issue, okay? I think a teacher secure, as a good teacher should be, in their competence would have no quarrel with demonstrating that competence and would, in fact, perhaps be interested in it.

MERROW: What about the teacher who says, "No, I don't want to have to be tested on my competence. I've been there; I've proved it. Look at my degrees. Look at my certificate."

SILVIERA: Well, that's just the point. You see, in the early '60s there was a desperate shortage of teachers. And many of the teachers hired at that time were not as competant as we would have liked. But the system then had no choice. These are the teachers that are now tenured and hanging in there. Meanwhile coming out of school today are highly competant young people who cannot find jobs. My position on the school board is we want the best teacher. And I guess that's what causes me to take a kind of hard-nosed approach to tenure and competency testing.

MERROW: They're tied in your mind, though. You're saying "We do have some incompetent teachers. Let's find out a way to weed them out, because there're a lot of good people out there who can find jobs."

SILVIERA: That's right.

MERROW: Let's talk about that incompetence question. I mean, you're giving me a seat-of-the-pants reaction. I mean you talk to them, and they say "I should have went." Do you have any idea in your head as to how many of the roughly 1100 teachers are not competent in the Stamford public schools?

SILVIERA: Gee, no, I wouldn't. My gut feeling is that it would be again, once again, a very small percentage. But you know, even two percent of 1100 is twenty-two. That would be twenty-two slots for good, new people.

MERROW: And how would you determine it?

SILVIERA: That's what's the tough thing. I'm not test happy. There are certain problems associated with tests, inherent problems that are problems with the test itself. But I feel so strongly that we must get superior teachers into this system that I think perhaps testing may be the alternative that will produce it. Supervision has not. And under tenure law we cannot.

MERROW: But it sounds as if you're willing to accept a test, which would measure knowledge, as an equivalent measure of teaching ability. And they really aren't the same thing.

SILVIERA: That's right. And that's the problem, because, unfortunately, teaching isn't an exact science. It's more like an art. But there are certain fundamentals that you could test for. For instance, clearly an English teacher should have a thorough and complete knowledge of grammar.

MERROW: So should a science teacher.

SILVIERA: He shouldn't be saying "should have went." Right. These are what would be maybe gross indicators of incompetence. A test which might pick up the gross incompetence is perhaps the best we could do with a test measure-

ment. I don't believe in selecting teachers -- well, for instance, in selecting a math teacher based on the highest score in a calculus examination. That would be wrong. But there are certain basics that you can test for, such as "Can he communicate?"

MERROW: You really do have designs on the tenure system. I mean you must have something in mind to replace it. You must have some form of job security in mind for teachers.

SILVIERA: Yes. I think the greatest job security is the strength of their present union. I would like to move for five year tenure renewal on a cyclical basis. In other words, you get your tenure for five years. Five years later you're up for review again.

MERROW: Why call that tenure? Why not just call it a five year contract? That's not tenure.

SILVIERA: That's right. Well, that would be all right.

MERROW: It would be all right with you. Do you have any -- do you, in your wildest flight of fancy, imagine a teachers' union would accept that?

SILVIERA: Of course they wouldn't. No, they wouldn't accept it. But I think there are more voters than teachers, and I think the public is demanding a replacement of the tenure year, simply because they recognize that the conditions which brought tenure into being, and appropriately brought tenure into being, do not exist now. The unions act to interpose themselves between the teacher and any kind of invidious political force which might take the teacher's job away from him or her without good reason.

MERROW: That's their job.

SILVIERA: The job of the union, right. Right. And they're doing a good job of it. So therefore, why tenure?

REINHARDT: Sally Silviera, a school board member in Stamford, Connecticut.

MERROW: That school system is not down and out and awful, by the way. Its students score well above the national average on standardized tests, and nearly seventy percent of the high school graduates go on for more education.

REINHARDT: Many administrators and school board members oppose tenure because they think it makes it too difficult to fire bad teachers.

MERROW: Teachers reply that it ought to be difficult. Teachers, and some administrators, agree that the real responsibility rests with the administration. It's easy to get rid of a bad teacher if administrators document ineffective teaching.

* * *

REINHARDT: What makes a good teacher?

CHILD: Nice. No work. Play all day.

CHILD: When you give her something like a present, she'll be very nice to you, and she'll never -- she'll never hit you or anything.

CHILD: She doesn't yell a lot.

CHILD: She's nice and pretty.

REINHARDT: Why is being pretty a good thing?

CHILD: She's so pretty that she attracts our attention, so we have to listen to her work.

CHILD: Sometimes she yells and yells and nobody listens to her. That's why she gets very mad. But I like her.

REINHARDT: Is it because she likes you?

CHILD: Yeah. She likes everybody. I know that.

UNIVERSITY TENURE SYSTEMS

REINHARDT: By the time some of these young critics go to college, they'll develop somewhat more sophisticated ways to evaluate their teachers.

MERROW: Their opinions might come in the form of a computer survey that asks questions like "How well was your course organized?" "How useful was the text?" "Were the lectures interesting?" "Was the grading system fair?"

REINHARDT: Sometimes the survey results for all professors come back to students in book form. Sometimes they're kept in the professor's personnel file, and occasionally they're used by tenure committees for evidence of good or bad teaching.

MERROW: The ultimate reward for good teaching at the college level is tenure. But the criteria for granting tenure go beyond how well the teacher performs in class.

REINHARDT: Let's take Indiana State University as an example. Non-tenured teachers at all levels there are evaluated yearly on their educational background, the amount of research and publishing they've done in their field, their contributions to the university and the community, and, finally, their association with students.

MERROW: A teacher with no prior university experience will get tenure after seven years at Indiana State, automatically.

REINHARDT: There are yearly reviews, but only for increases in merit pay.

MERROW: Like diamonds, tenure lasts forever.

REINHARDT: Today, fifty-six percent of college and university faculty have tenure. Ironically, on some campuses, that percentage is going up, but not because those colleges are granting tenure. It's increasing because they're having to lay off faculty, and the ones who leave are, naturally, the ones without tenure.

MERROW: The basic rules and policies for granting tenure on most campuses follow guidelines developed by the American Association of University Professors. When I talked with Jordan Kurland, Associate General Counsel of the AAUP, I asked him what the differences are between public school tenure and college level tenure.

KURLAND: Well, the difference routinely -- it's not true for every school district in the country. But routinely, teacher tenure in the public schools comes after three years. And a teacher who meets basic standards of competence in the classroom and a teacher whose personal characteristics are not grossly objectionable will tend to get tenure if there's a vacancy, somewhat like with the civil servant. It's a routine step rather than a non-routine step for a teacher to get tenure. In the university world -- and I have to keep saying that they differ vastly. It isn't one homogeneous world. But I read the other day, at Harvard, one assistant professor out of sixteen can expect tenure at Harvard. The standards, the number of tenured

vacancies, and the like, differ greatly from what is the general case in the public school system.

MERROW: Do colleges and universities have a good, reliable, valid, etcetera, system for determining whether an instructor, or teacher or professor is doing a good job of teaching?

KURLAND: I don't think it would be feasible or desirable to have some kind of a national test, like one would have to license a technician, to decide whether one is a good teacher. It's a terribly subjective field that we're talking about. I do know that we have college after college these days insisting that no one is getting a permanent appointment unless that person checks out well in teaching.

MERROW: Yes or no: is tenure in danger?

KURLAND: Well, not in any significant danger.

REINHARDT: Jordan Kurland of the American Association of University Professors in Washington, D. C.

ADVERSE IMPACTS OF TENURE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

MERROW: When the federal government raised the retirement age from 65 to 70, it offered professors the opportunity to stay within the ivy covered university walls a little longer than they'd expected. But it frustrated young Ph. D. students who were searching for jobs in an already crowded teaching market.

REINHARDT: One university president who is outspoken in his attack on tenure for older teachers is Steven Horn of California State University in Long Beach.

HORN: Every university in the nation, be it Harvard, Stanford, Long Beach, Berkeley, whatever, has people that have gone out to lunch, if you will, years ago and have not quite come back, have not kept up on their field. What is kinder to an individual: to have the peer group start making some tough judgments, to put people out at age 65, knowing that, in a sense, they have failed, or to have a cutoff point where you give the person the gold watch and perhaps erect the portrait in the departmental library, and they can feel they left with some accomplishment? I think in terms of personal wear and tear on the individual and the traumas that that will lead to, should American universities be forced into the position of having to continue people for another five years, then both the university administration, the trustees and the peer group that is left behind that wants that university and that school and that department to go somewhere are going to have to make some very tough decisions. They might not always be a kind decision in terms of individuals' feelings who have not been cutting the mustard, but have had a sinecure, if you will, and have been able to continue essentially, as I suggest, for thirty years without review.

GLENN: Why couldn't the university judge the faculty on an individual basis when it comes to that point, 65?

HORN: Well, I would agree. I think in many universities that is going to happen. But there is a tendency in many fields to say, good old Joe or good old Susie, he or she has eight kids, or six kids, or four kids: let's not really put them out on this tough employment market. Well, fine; that might be kind to good old Joe and good old Susie. It isn't kind to the hundreds or students, or the thousands of students that that person interacts with over time. It isn't kind to the university and its desire for quality. It isn't kind to the community or taxpayers that pay the bill. Right now if you're in a major university community, you see Ph. Ds driving taxicabs. If you go to Washington, D. C. you see Ph. Ds driving taxicabs.

it means . . . e'll be less opportunity for women, less opportunities for minorities, less opportunities for talented people, generally, who happen to be under 35. I don't think America can afford to have an alienated, unemployed intelligentsia, highly trained, roaming the streets. And that's exactly where we're leading to with this type of policy.

On the other hand, when you're faced with a particular situation in the university, which is far different than an industrial corporation -- in an industrial corporation, if somebody goes out to lunch twenty years ago, you can take him off the active job in the line, you can put him in a staff job at headquarters. They don't have to exert themselves. You can send them out to some field station you don't care about, and you can carry 'em. Japanese industry: they carry them. They've got a lifetime commitment. In a university, if somebody in a particular subfield of a discipline is not up to it, the fact is that whole subfield in a university suffers, and there's no way you can take a first-rate professor of chemistry and make him into a first-rate professor of English.

REINHARDT: Steven Horn, President of California State University at Long Beach, speaking with Henry Glenn of Station KLON.

MERROW: Horn's second point, that too much tenure reduces the institution's flexibility -- that is, it can't hire young teachers -- is often connected with the economic argument against tenure.

REINHARDT: That is, if everybody's on tenure, it's extremely difficult to fire anybody when student enrollment dips.

MERROW: And today student enrollment is going down in the public schools, and it's about to drop in colleges and universities. Money, and not concern for excellence in teaching, may be the major reason that tenure and teacher accountability are such big issues in education.

REINHARDT: We began this hour with a question: how can you tell if a teacher's good? We've heard a lot of answers, from ask the kids....

MERROW: To let the administrators decide....

REINHARDT: To give the teachers a test....

MERROW: To judge teachers by the kids' test scores....

REINHARDT: To you just know; you can tell by your gut reaction.

MERROW: There's still another way to answer the question, and that is to say most school officials aren't really all that interested in good teaching. They want schools to run smoothly and classrooms to be orderly, and so that's how they judge teachers.

REINHARDT: Our own answer, though, is that teaching is, in fact, an art, and that all our measures of teaching effectiveness are proxies, substitutes for what is, so far any way, impossible to measure.

MERROW: That means measure what you can, how much teachers know about their subject, whether they keep up to date, and whether they treat their students fairly.

CHILD: She's a nice teacher. She teaches us a lot. And she likes to do all the stuff we like to do.

CHILD: She tells jokes, and she doesn't get all that mad, and she doesn't shake you around. And if you don't bring your homework, she makes you, like, you know, do it for homework on that night, or something like that. And she gives you extra recess every once in a while.

CHILD: He's really good, and I'll learn a lot from him.

CHILD: She gives us -- gives us not so hard work, and all that stuff.

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MERROW: The transcript of "How Good Is Your Teacher?" is available for fifty cents. The cassette costs five dollars.

REINHARDT: You can get either, or both, by writing National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D. C., 20036.

MERROW: Ask for Program Number 134, "How Good Is Your Teacher?" It's fifty cents for the transcript, five dollars for the cassette.

REINHARDT: And here's the address again: National Public Radio -- Education, Washington, D. C., 20036. When you write, please tell us the call letters of your local NPR station.

MERROW: We usually tell you right about now that you can also get a program guide with our schedule for the month ahead. And you may do that. But we thought we'd take a second to tell you, right now, what's ahead on OPTIONS IN EDUCATION.

REINHARDT: Here's a short list. "Learning To Be An American," or citizenship education.

MERROW: "Religious Education," including the never-dead school prayer issue.

REINHARDT: "Affirmative Action" in the aftermath of the Bakke decision.

MERROW: "Local School Boards: Are They Losing Their Power?"

REINHARDT: "School Violence," which means not just what kids do to schools, but also what schools do to kids.

MERROW: There'll be other topics this fall, and so Barbara and I hope you'll be with us every week.

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REINHARDT: Material for this program came, in part, from Richard Baker, KSAC in Manhattan, Kansas; Henry Glenn, KLON, Long Beach, California; David Freudberg, WGBH, Boston; and Jay Baltezore in San Francisco.

MERROW: OPTIONS IN EDUCATION is a co-production of the Institute for Educational Leadership of the George Washington University and National Public Radio.

REINHARDT: Principal support for the series is provided by the National Institute of Education.

MERROW: Other funds come from Carnegie Corporation of New York and the Corporation for Public Broadcasting.

REINHARDT: This series is written and produced by John Merrow. The Assistant Producer is Natalie Iglitz. Production assistance by Mark Sommer, and technical assistance by Mark Hoffman and Al Friedman. I'm Barbara Reinhardt.

MERROW: I'm John Merrow, and this is NPR, National Public Radio.

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